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To provide all children with quality education, teachers must rethink their educational philosophies, according to the president of the American Reading Council. Traditional teaching methods, including phonics, basal readers, tracking, and standardized testing appear to be the cause of school failure. The efficacy of the current models of reform such as site-based management/site-based decision making (SBM/SDM) and school choice should also be questioned. Quality education will be achieved if schools adopt the guidelines of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) and increase parental involvement. Influential lay decision makers are the key to overcoming present obstacles to change in the educational community. (SG)

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by Julia R. Palmer

An Occasional Paper

of the American Reading Council

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HOW JOHNNY (and Mary and Juan and Maria and All Children) *CAN* READ

by Julia R. Palmer

Abstract

To provide **all** children with quality education, teachers must rethink their educational philosophies, asserts Julia R. Palmer, president of the American Reading Council. Palmer indicts traditional teaching methods, including phonics, basal readers, tracking, and standardized testing, as the cause of school failure. She also questions the efficacy of the current models of reform such as SBM/SDM and school choice. Quality education will be achieved if schools adopt the guidelines of the NAEYC, NCTE, and the NCTM and increase parental involvement. Influential lay decision makers, Palmer contends, are the key to overcoming present obstacles to change in the educational community.

HOW JOHNNY
(and Mary and Juan and Maria and All Children)
CAN READ

by Julia R. Palmer
President,
The American Reading Council, Ltd.

The authors of the United States Constitution labored hard and long to create a form of government which would protect its citizens' rights and be responsive to those rights.

Such a government cannot survive without a literate, well educated citizenry.

As a result, ensuring that all American children become literate is essential to our form of government.

And now, in the latter part of the 20th Century, we are learning that good education for all is not only essential for the survival of our form of government, it is essential for our economic survival as well. Three out of four jobs now require some education beyond high school. This country loses an estimated $225 billion annually in lost industrial productivity, unrealized tax revenues and related social problems because of illiteracy. According to the U.S. Bureau of Educational Statistics, over a million American 17-year-olds, either as high school graduates or as dropouts, swell the number of functional illiterates each year. By the year 2000, more than 15% of the workforce will be black or Hispanic. The current dropout rate for blacks and Hispanics in urban areas is higher than 50%.

In the simpler world of the 18th, 19th, and early 20th century, men could and did earn an adequate living with a very low level of literacy. Agriculture and assembly line manufacturing were among the many avenues open to those who could barely read. In fact, as late as the 1960s, illiterate men on the automobile assembly lines owned their own homes, had a car in their garage, and felt secure.

Thus, a good education for all was not seen as essential by any level of government. Now it is.

How Did We Get in This Fix?

Phonics and Basal Readers

In the early 1920s, several national trends led the teaching of reading to take a seriously wrong turn. Deeply impressed by the miracle of the Ford assembly line and other manufacturing influences, schools adopted an industrial hierarchical form of school organization and teaching. Educators somehow persuaded themselves that reading was simply "sounding out words" and that the easiest way to learn how to do this was to fragment words as assembly line jobs were fragmented. Thus, the pseudo-science of "phonics" was adopted.

A second national phenomenon was an acute shortage of educated women to teach the post World War I baby boomers.

Educational publishers met this challenge by designing "basal" reading series which were created to be "teacher proof" by providing teachers' manuals which instructed the teacher step by simple step exactly what to do.

Since English is by no means a phonetic language, it quickly became clear that it was necessary to arrange the language of the basal readers to suit the purpose of teaching children to sound out words. Thus was basal language born — an unnatural language which does not flow and is therefore difficult to read. Nancy Larrick, the nationally known reading expert and a founder of the International Reading Association, says "Some one has said that the language of the basal readers is the only language in print which has never been spoken by a living soul. Yet basal readers are scattered all over the United States like acid rain." In basals, mothers "heat meat" rather than cook because the object, at that point, is to teach the sound of long e's rather than to communicate ideas. Primers are full of such nonsensical sentences as: "I can fan the man, said Dan." "Can you fan the man?" No wonder children say "I don't understand what I read." Frequently, there is so little content in the basal readers that it is almost impossible to paraphrase or tell the story, as children love to do with real books. The basal language is not only hard to read, it is **boring**.

This way of teaching reading has resulted in millions of 3rd graders across the nation who do well on the 2nd grade standardized reading test (which is a major test of sounding out, and a minimal test of comprehension) but who cannot understand what they "read." Meaning has been divorced from print.

Tracking

A further destructive result of this way of teaching reading has been the establishment of "tracking", as grouping by ability is called. The teachers' manuals command the teacher to use the same material and teaching methods for every one at the same time. But because children, especially young children, learn in different ways and at different speeds, teachers felt compelled to try to sort children out and to

create groups with supposedly similar abilities. This has led to a hierarchy of students from the "gifted and talented" to the "slow", and a corresponding differentiation of expectations and teaching approaches.

Tracking is a major cause of dropping out. Children who learn in kindergarten or 1st grade that they are in the slow group (in their minds, the stupid group) quickly lose confidence in their ability to learn. Their teachers, too, have low expectations for them.

Abundant research has shown that children in the low track are given far less attention by teachers, spend large amounts of time filling in work books and drilling on isolated discrete skills and, if allowed to read, are given only the basal readers. By contrast, children in the high group get a great deal of teacher attention and frequently gain access to stimulating materials such as good stories or exciting nonfiction. These materials could also motivate and stimulate the low group, but since they rarely, if ever, get to see them, they decide they hate "reading" and lose all expectation that books could be meaningful in their lives. Thus a self fulfilling prophecy is implemented.

Standardized Testing

A third destructive trend that appeared in the early 20's was the arrival on the educational scene of multiple choice tests. These tests, which first appeared in the form of IQ tests in the early 20's, created a sensation and appealed to two strong American traits, the urge to quantify everything and the reverence for what appears to be scientific certainty. They swept the country. Soon multiple choice tests for college admission, for reading, for math, and for all sorts of purposes appeared.

These tests have gradually come to be recognized as inaccurate despite their appearance of scientific objectivity. Shockingly, it appears that children's IQ can be raised by early intervention and stimulus! This fact, of course, indicates that the IQ scores are influenced by nurture and environment rather than heredity. Educators have also come to recognize that the multiple choice tests are often irrelevant, frequently testing trivia rather than substance. Furthermore, they are almost invariably biased against certain segments of society, i.e. those who do not come from a middle class background, women, African Americans, Hispanics and (interestingly enough) those who think deeply rather than superficially and who see many aspects of a problem. Although multiple-choice testing's deficits are now becoming recognized, its use has lasted and even multiplied geometrically because it is possible to correct these tests inexpensively by machine.

Authentic tests which test the behavior required in the real world, such as the ability to write a persuasive letter or essay or the ability to think through a problem or analyze a piece of writing, are far more expensive to grade because they require humans to read them. Interestingly, although many people have thought that grades provided by the multiple choice tests are more **objective** than those provided by

human graders, research is now showing that this is a myth. The courts have found the research evidence of bias in the multiple choice tests so compelling that many are now banned and others, still being used, are headed for replacement, in some cases with authentic tests. Furthermore, research now reveals that well trained humans produce objective and consistent judgements on these authentic tests.

A myth which misleads many people about education in the United States and thereby creates a barrier to change is the myth that the content of education in a given community's schools is governed by local control. Many good people become school board members and work conscientiously to improve their local schools. They do so under the illusion that there is local control. Most would be horrified at the idea of a Federally imposed curriculum. Yet virtually all elementary schools throughout the United States use one of five basal reading series, all very similar and all based on the same obsolete theory of reading as sounding out. Similarly, virtually all elementary schools use standard math textbooks, textbooks which are equally closely tied to the nationally standardized math tests and which are equally based on obsolete educational theories. There is a national curriculum in the elementary school. It is one dictated by the textbook manufacturers and the standardized tests which are tied to these textbooks.

Is There A Solution, And, If So, What Is It?

What very few people — the media, politicians, business people and parents — are aware of is the fact that in the last twenty years there has been an explosion of new knowledge about how children can and will learn when the new knowledge is put to work.

When children, even low-income children and children from non-English speaking homes, are offered education based on this new knowledge, they all learn to read and write with excitement and enthusiasm. They astound their teachers. A similar situation exists as far as arithmetic, science and social studies are concerned. The human animal is naturally curious and desperately eager to make sense of his world. Children are avid learners before they enter school. It turns out that they can continue to be avid learners right through elementary school provided they are not blocked by obsolete school textbooks and school practices.

Three highly respected educational associations, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), each having 70,000 to 90,000 members, have worked hard over the last few years to synthesize the new knowledge in their fields to enable schools to take advantage of this new knowledge and to change their way of organizing their classes and of teaching.

The new knowledge is built on research, experience and common sense. In

general, the new way of teaching takes account of three principles:

1. Real learning involves risk-taking. Therefore, children need to have self-confidence.

2. Young children learn through concrete experiences. Abstractions mean nothing to them. Therefore, they need to have "hands-on" learning experiences.

3. What children figure out for themselves, they understand and remember forever. What they are told, they forget.

Moreover, there is a growing understanding that students need real books, written by authors because they have something to communicate, instead of basal readers written by committees to teach fragmented, discrete skills. Children need literature to stimulate their imaginations and to learn to understand human nature, including their own nature. They also need daily opportunities to write in an atmosphere where thinking and writing content are emphasized.

Parental Involvement

Last, but not least, we must actively involve parents in their children's education. Every research study shows , that where parents understand that they must care and help in their children's education , that involvement is a more important element in the child's success or failure than whether the parents are rich or poor, school dropouts or college-educated.

Many schools, and many teachers, complain about parent apathy and, in many neighborhoods, rich and poor, parents will not become involved in the schools without considerable outreach. Many parents undervalue their influence on their children. Others have had unhappy school experiences. Others have overwhelming problems and feel they cannot take on more especially since, in the majority of schools, going to a parents' meeting involves cake sales rather than policies which really affect education.

But parent involvement and parent understanding of the new ways of teaching that can help all children to succeed, is critically important. Parents, who now look to the standardized tests to tell them if their child's school is doing a good job, need to learn that such tests are a poor indicator, and that if their child is not learning to read, it is probably the school's fault, **not** the child's. They need to learn that skill and drill work does not create readers or writers or thinkers. This is a period in our history where a parent's understanding and knowledge about schooling can really have a major impact on their children's future.

Barriers to Change

Unfortunately, the new way of teaching requires some drastic changes, and educators, like other human beings, dislike and are frightened by change.

The key obstacle to making this new knowledge generally known and used, is that both supervisors and teachers have been, for several generations, trained to use and rely upon basal readers and workbooks geared to the second grade nationally standardized examinations. Teaching in kindergarten, first and second grade is now largely devoted to getting students to do well on the second grade reading and math tests — the first nationally normed tests to which children are subjected. Standardized test results are usually published in the newspapers and schools are judged by their students' performance on the tests. School personnel are understandably loath to abandon the basals and workbooks which are tightly geared to these tests.

The new way of teaching is also a very real threat to the publishers of the basals and math textbooks and the standardized tests, both of which must be replaced if we are to have quality education. The publishers are understandably unwilling to abandon a billion dollar industry and, since they have not themselves studied the educational research, they do not believe that all Americans will ever become avid readers, and therefore book buyers.

There is a great deal being written and said these days about school governance and how schools are organized. The present school system is characterized (justly, I believe) as obsolete and out of sync with the times because it is based on the industrial factory model of the 1920's.

Yet very little is being said about the fact that the **curriculum**, both in content and in teaching method, also dates from the 20's.

If a man with tuberculosis were treated today by a doctor with the medical practices of the 1920's, that doctor would be held criminally liable. Teachers are one of the very few professional groups that have neither a financial nor a legal reason to keep up with what is going on in their field. Doctors and pharmacists are required to by law. Lawyers and accountants would soon lose their clients if they didn't follow professional developments. But teachers and supervisors often go on year after year using the same methods and educational theory they were taught years ago.

And a parent who sends her/his child to the local school has no recourse if the child (as will be true in over 90% of American schools) is taught with the educational practices of the 1920's. This is true even though the record of failure to produce literate citizens has been disastrous for years.

Parents, too, can pose an obstacle to change. Since most parents were themselves taught with basals and workbooks, those who are literate usually believe that they learned to read through the use of phonics, and quite naturally want their chil-

dren to have the same treatment. But the fact that students **who can already read** master phonics easily and thus learn to sound out unfamiliar words has fooled people into thinking that it was the other way around; that they learned phonics first and then reading.

A second group of parents resist change because they believe standardized tests are a vital tool to assure them that their child is attending a "good" school. They do not realize that there are alternative forms of assessment which will give them far better information about their child's progress.

Another resistant group of parents are those with "gifted and talented" children or children in the top group. It is natural to be proud of the fact that your child is a member of an elite group and such parents strongly resist the elimination of tracking and the concept of heterogeneous grouping even though research and experience have shown that this classroom arrangement is best for **all** children.

Because of these obstacles to school reform, it is critically important for **influential lay decision-makers**, as well as educators, to understand the issues involved and to bring pressure to bear on the schools to start meeting the standards and guidelines of the three professional associations named above.

Current Reforms: Real or Imagined?

School Based Decision Making

I mentioned a movement to reorganize the management of public schools in order to place major educational decisions at the individual school level.

How does the need for schools to meet the standards and guidelines of the NAEYC, the NCTE and the NCTM fit in with this movement?

I believe the two needs are completely compatible.

Just as the school organization of the 1920's was shaped by the influence of the factory and the assembly line, so the current campaign to restructure schools has been deeply influenced by current business practices and by such books on American companies as *In Search of Excellence*. The top leadership of American industry has abandoned the hierarchical factory model of the 20's onward and moved to shared decision making, utilizing quality circles which tap into the creativity and input of all workers, and giving small groups flexibility and autonomy. It is moving from mass markets to diversity and targeted markets.

It has also moved to a different understanding of the value of human resources and hence a different way of treating employees. For example, an alcoholic employee now gets counselling instead of the instant dismissal that would have prevailed

20 years ago. Many businesses are moving to help employees with their child care and elder care responsibilities and are incorporating such psychological aids to good communication and interpersonal relations as the Myers-Briggs test.

All these many changes have been made in the **framework** of research results and of study of the successful business practices of other countries. In addition, technological advances, (also based on research) such as robotics, lasers, and super-conductivity are being incorporated as swiftly as possible into industrial practices.

Educators see the changes the business world is making and want to learn from them and adapt them to the way schools are organized and managed. They see the new attitude to human resources and want to change the treatment of teachers from time clock punching peons to responsible, intelligent human beings creating exciting responsible ways for children to learn.

But do they also see the urgency of incorporating the results of research and experience into school reform? Is there confusion between the desire to create local decision making and the urgent necessity to bring teaching methods into the modern age?

The United States is having to shift from a school system that has educated a third of its students quite well, a third in a mediocre way and left a third or more unequipped to deal with the modern world to a system which equips **everyone** of its children for the modern world.

If we are going to educate **every** child, and I deeply believe we can and must do so, we are going to have to call on all our intelligence and knowledge. We need the best thinking of industry as exemplified in the new management arrangements and the best thinking of our universities and classroom teachers as exemplified by the work of the three professional associations cited above. We need both the study and research of industry and also the study and research of the educators.

Let's see how it could work. Here are some possible scenarios. In all these scenarios, it is assumed that the schools involved have made the decision that their goal is to meet the standards and guidelines of the professional associations. Yet the school councils are still being called upon for major academic decisions and initiatives.

School A has more than 50% Hispanic students. It has a deep interest in bilingual education. It also has some outstanding bilingual teachers. The school council feels that the Hispanic students will have a better self image and learn English faster if they see the monolingual English-speaking students learning Spanish. It also feels the English-speaking students will benefit by getting an early start on a second language. It decides to try having the kindergarten and first grade use only English on Monday, only Spanish on Tuesday, only English on Wednesday, etc.

School B is in a very high crime area and gangs are developing. The school council decides that school morale is a very high priority. It mandates school uniforms and appoints a subcommittee to look into adopting some of the practices of the Fellowship of Reconciliation or those of the Teachers for Moral Responsibility. It decides that the school philosophy will emphasize cooperative learning and conflict resolution in all the grades.

School C has many teachers who are deeply interested and well informed on science teaching. Its principal understands the need for an integrated curriculum. The school council decides to use science as a tool to integrate the curriculum. Not only will the children have hands-on science experience, they will do science related mathematics, they will gain writing skills as they describe their experiments, they will read biographies of scientists and their social studies will focus on the impact of science on their lives. Teachers are energized as they work out new lesson plans to implement the scheme.

School D has many homeless children and has focused its budget on obtaining as many paraprofessionals as possible in order to create the best possible adult/child ratio in the classroom for these troubled youngsters. Now the parent representatives on the school council explain that both parents and paras are unhappy at the new kind of education the children are getting. They deeply believe in rote learning and workbooks. After all, that's what they had when they were young. The school council decides to appoint a subcommittee to work with the principal to devise new and better ways to communicate with the parents to reassure them and to increase their involvement in their children's' education. It also decides to ask the District office for staff development for the paras.

School E has many children in need of remediation. Because the original legislation on the Federal and State level required remediation to supplement and not supplant regular instruction, children who get remedial help have uniformly been pulled out of their regular classroom for this purpose. Most children very much dislike this practice. It stigmatizes them and separates them from their classmates. In addition, the practice is often counter-productive. A student in need of help in reading or math may often miss the regular reading or math class with the teacher in order to get remedial help from a less well trained paraprofessional.

Last year, the regulations for Chapter 1 were changed. A school with 75% low income students may institute a school wide program. School E's school council took this step. All Chapter 1 personnel are now being used either as staff developers or as team teachers.

In each of these possible scenarios, the school councils are making important academic decisions which will very much affect the education of the students in their schools. They are making use of the new research on how children learn and tailoring their teaching methods to real needs. The decisions they are making all further the goal of meeting the standards of the professional associations.

Thus far, I have written as if school councils were the only form of site based management that exists and also as if I thought they were invariably a good idea.

Certainly, like most people with experience with our country's public school system, I am a strong believer in restructuring the governance system. I am also a strong believer in whatever will enable teachers to become the strong professionals they need to be to educate our children for the 21st century. I am an enthusiastic supporter of better working conditions for teachers.

That being said, I am very fearful that the current wave of school councils will turn out to be one more education fad that fails. Since this particular reform has raised very high hopes among many teachers, its failure could have serious, if not catastrophic, consequences for the public school system. My hope is that it will evolve into a format with more promise of success.

Administration is a difficult art. It is also extremely time consuming. Group decision making by consensus is also an art and even more time consuming. Yet no time has been built into the school day for all the deliberations necessary to run the school. Right now many teachers are meeting at 7:30 AM, a difficult thing to do if one has family responsibilities. And we are already, in New York and Rochester, beginning to hear talk of "teacher burn out". It may be that, if schools are to be run by teacher councils, teachers will have to put in a longer day. This should bring extra pay, of course, but I don't see how teachers can be responsible teachers and responsible administrators on a 5 or 5-1/2 hour day.

A second defect of most school restructuring plans is that they are not designed to create a partnership with parents and the community. Yet, as I said above, I believe such a partnership is an essential prerequisite for quality education in this day and age.

I am also a great believer in **leadership**. Collective leadership is far more difficult to achieve than individual leadership. Effective school principals have always sought and obtained ongoing input from their teachers and sought to create partnership relationships with parents. I have seen excellent private schools and alternative schools in this country where that kind of leadership and partnership led to quality education. I have seen the same thing in England in government schools, private schools, and the so-called "public schools". There are many ways to create site-based management. I am deeply interested in the Chicago experiment where parent and community involvement has been built in from the start and where it seems, in at least some instances, the principal, once he/she has been given a contract by the school council, will be responsible for educational decisions, with, I hope, input from the teachers.

School Choice

A second school reform being held out as a panacea for all our educational ills, is school choice. The successful private and alternative schools mentioned above are shining examples of parent choice. What is not so often mentioned is that they are also important examples of principal and teacher choice. Most such schools have a clear, well defined educational philosophy. Teachers who share that philosophy, are attracted to the school because they feel that in such a school, they can act on their beliefs of what is right for children. Parents who choose the school because of its philosophy, come prepared to cooperate with and support the school.

Why can't **all** public schools be like that? In the first place, according to John Goodlad, in his book *A Place Called School*, the majority of American public schools have no clear educational philosophy. Quite a few are now struggling to articulate such a philosophy. But, even where that is happening, the lack of teacher and principal choice can invalidate the whole process. Teacher seniority is ranked as far more important than school philosophy. A teacher with seniority frequently can and does bump a teacher with lesser seniority in order to get a job for quite other reasons than philosophy. In such cases, the principal and remaining staff are helpless. It is interesting to note that, in New York, where the present Chancellor is pushing site-based management by school councils as vigorously as possible, he was unwilling to ask the teachers' union to abrogate seniority in order to protect the decision making team in case of lay offs.

A fact also not often mentioned in the case of the success of private and alternative schools is their size. They are mostly far smaller than the average public school where for many years there was a mistaken belief in the economy of scale. "Small (really) is Beautiful" for children. Small schools are somewhat more expensive than big ones but the cost is inconsequential in comparison to the results. Many of our worst ills, the dropout problem, the teen pregnancy problem, the drug and alcohol abuse problem would be vastly diminished if schools were so small that every child was known to the principal and felt he/she was important to the school.

How to Change Schools

Both governance and school choice are much in the news and have passionate supporters. Neither one **directly** affects what goes on in the classroom. What we need are equally passionate supporters of incorporating the results of research and experience into school reform. A recent report by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) states:

"The truth may be that relatively few children are receiving the education they need for life in the 21st century. There is considerable evidence that large numbers of students graduate from school lacking the skills needed by employers and expected by college professors. As diagnosed in one study, these young people

are not at-risk, yet they are not workforce ready. For at-risk populations, the mismatch between workplace needs and workforce skills is even greater. According to a recent report from the National Alliance of Business:

> *It is estimated that by 1995, 14 million Americans will be unprepared for the jobs that are available. Many companies are concerned that they will not be able to find employees who can even read or do simple arithmetic. Business Week reports $210 billion is spent annually by American companies to train and upgrade their workers, which exceeds the $195 billion annual expenditure for public elementary and secondary education. Because $20 billion of that private sector budget is already earmarked for remedial education (a total that can be expected to increase), companies are forced to pay twice for education—first through taxes and then for internal remedial programs—for what the schools could not or did not achieve."*

There is an urgent necessity to bring teaching methods into the modern age.

Some individual teachers are already seeking the power to make decisions about curriculum and ways of teaching. They **have** studied the new ways and want to adopt them. But it is going to take a **team** effort. Principals and other supervisors are critically important. They must be involved — indeed be the leaders of this effort. They too must study the new ways.

Where every one in a school has understood the new philosophy of education and the new knowledge of how children learn, there will be dramatic changes and exciting improvement.

But, if local decisions makers do not have this expertise, what then?

Twenty-five years ago, two books, Jonathan Kozol's *Death at an Early Age* and Nat Hentoff's *Our Children Are Dying*, painted a realistic and devastating picture of what was happening to children in low income schools in New York and Boston. These books made it clear that many minority children had virtually no future in our society, not through any fault of their own, but because of the way their schools and their worlds were treating them. Both pointed to the urgent need for reform. At the time of their publication, however, well-meaning educators were not at all sure, and certainly not agreed on, what to do to change this, and little was done.

Now, twenty-five years later, a book entitled Young, Black and Male in America: An Endangered Species shows that the harsh reality which Hentoff and Kozol described not only continues to be true today, but the problems have worsened. These problems are equally devastating for Hispanics and other low income children.

What is different today, however, is that we now **know** how to rescue the children and set them on rewarding and productive paths. There is an extraordinary

consensus on the kind of education that works for **all** children—not just an elite few.

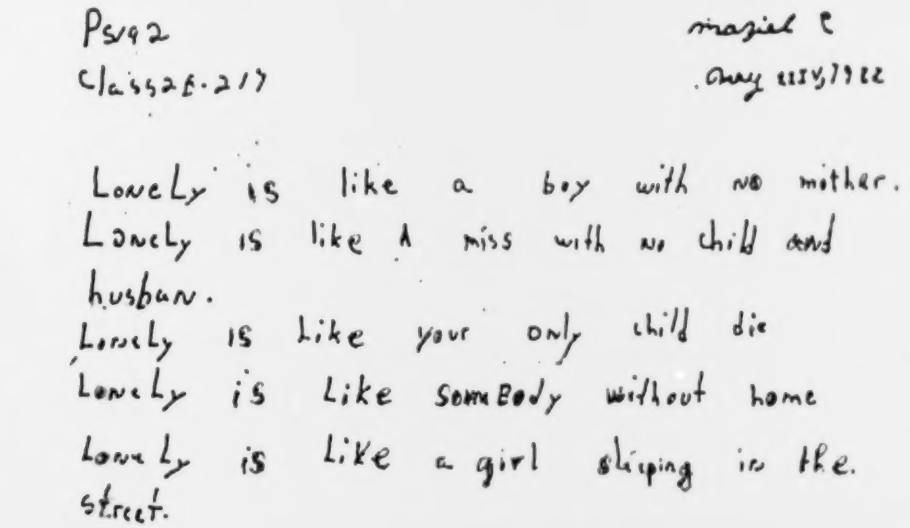
I believe business people, parents, politicians and the media have a moral as well as a practical responsibility to familiarize themselves with the guidelines of the three associations described above and challenge the school based decision makers to find a way to meet them. When they do so there will be a real flowering of American education. Where these guidelines are being observed, children are responding with a quality of performance that awes their teachers. It appears that 90% of American children could be performing at the level of the present top quartile.

New Zealand adopted similar guidelines over 20 years ago. This country, which has a large Maori and Samoan population, is now conceded to be the most literate country in the world (based on essay type tests in the various disciplines). Both Maoris and Samoans are non-English speaking peoples with a hunter-gatherer culture. Yet their children are achieving better at every age level than American children or even the Japanese. And they are doing this without the intense pressure for which Japanese education has been criticized. All the children become real book lovers and most become astonishingly proficient readers and writers.

The American Reading Council's Open Sesame program has shown similar results serving a population of children 96% of whom come from families with incomes below the poverty level and 92%from homes where English is a second language.

One of the important advantages of the new way of teaching is that it gives a voice to the many low income youngsters who now express their rage and frustration in ugly graffiti and violence. In a whole language program, these children learn at an early age, to use written language for their deep feelings.

A low income Hispanic seven-year-old, a recent immigrant, wrote this after a class discussion of the meaning of the word <u>lonely:</u>


Ps/92
Class2E.217
LoveLy is like a boy with no mither.
LoneLy is like A miss with no chilf and husban.
LoneLy is Like your only chilf die
LoneLy is Like SomeBody without home
LoneLy is Like a girl sliping in the. street.

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It is ironic that in the majority of American schools this child's spelling and grammar would be corrected and his thoughts go unappreciated. In the standard curriculum, "comprehension" and higher order thinking skills are not taught until the third grade. Low teacher expectations and a focus on form rather than content would keep the teacher from recognizing how perceptive his definitions are.

The human potential is clearly there, within this boy and all other children. It should be acknowledged and allowed to flourish —for our own sakes as well as theirs. If schools will change their obsolete curricula and free youngsters to be creative problem solvers, we can once more become the "Land of Opportunity" for **all** our citizens.

Julia R. Palmer is the founder and president of the American Reading Council and has worked in the field of education for over thirty years. She is the author of *Read For Your Life,* which chronicles her experiences in creating and running her own bookmobile in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant section in the early 1960s. In 1983, she received the "Citizen of the Year Award" from the White House Conference on Library and Information Services.

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45 John Street, Room 908
New York, New York 10038

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